

White Paper

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Introduction



From 2010-2013, archaeologists at Montpelier uncovered evidence at three different sites of homes for the enslaved community at Montpelier. (This project was partially funded by a three-year NEH Collaborative Research Grant). These homes were abandoned in the 1840s when the Dolley Madison sold Montpelier (including the enslaved individuals that made up this community) with the former homes either being razed or allowed to decay in place. Since that time, these sites have been undisturbed, leaving a veritable treasure trove of evidence for appearance of the homes for various members of the enslaved community. This four-year study allowed us to recover enough evidence for the appearance to reconstruct what the homes of the enslaved domestics, skilled artisans, and field slaves. The archaeology carried out at these sites had four goals:

1. locate the physical structures of the enslaved family homes and assess the architecture present at the sites
2. define the yards surrounding the structures
3. recover a large assemblage of artifacts to understand what sort of household items slaves owned
4. analyze the data from the sites and provide research reports summarizing the field finds (features and deposits); artifact assemblages, and specialized analysis (most especially faunal and floral)

A key part of this research project has been [our public programs](#) where participants can spend a week working with our archaeological staff. Each of these sites is briefly described below and there are links provided from the full excavation report and the full analysis of artifacts recovered from each site.

For the overall analysis of the faunal (animal bones) remains, see the following report:

Faunal Analysis for all four NEH Sites

South Yard



The South Yard is a site of homes of the enslaved house servants at the mansion. Archaeological excavations of these homes revealed these structures to have wooden floors, brick or stone chimneys, glazed windows, and to be framed structures. As such, these structures were a far cry from the crude log cabins that most slaves (and for that matter most folks in the American South) lived in. These homes created a neat village type appearance that was meant to be seen from the mansion--and as they were within the formal grounds of the Madison's home, meant to be seen. Rather

than presenting a better quality of life, residents of these homes would be under the constant scrutiny of the main house, had raised wooden floors that would left in drafts, and not have large amounts of yard space for their daily activities. In addition, activities in this yard space (such as the smoke houses and barbecue trench) were directed more towards the conveniences of the Madisons rather than the families living in this space. The contrast to these homes can be seen in the neighboring structure lived in by Granny Millie. Today the South Yard is "ghosted" with timber-frame outlines to show the size and location of the homes and buildings that were once here. For more information on this site, see the [end of season blog](#).

During the 2015-2017 season we will be reconstructing the South Yard thanks to a gift from David Rubenstein. For more information on this project, please see the following document ([click here to download](#)). Also you can check the progress on the South Yard project with our webcam ([Click here to see webcam](#)):

[Full Excavation Report](#)

[Full Object Report](#)

[Floral Analysis](#)

[Architectural Structure Report](#)



Stable Yard--Granny Millie's Home

The Stable Quarter (aka Granny Milly's cabin) was occupied by skilled artisans who either worked in the stable or the garden) In contrast, the neighboring structure, the quarter located in the adjacent Stable Yard, was a more tradition log dwelling with a stick and mud chimney, at-grade hearth and evidence for clay floors. This structure was outside of the formal grounds of the mansion and located within the stable yard and craft complex—an area between the mansion formal grounds and the larger farm complex. Its construction using materials requiring little refinement (hewn logs and clay) was more typical of enslaved homes across the Piedmont (Finch 1833). This structure also had a sub-floor pit that would have allowed the residents to store sweet potatoes through the winter--no such storage pits were located in the homes in the South Yard. Today the Stable Quarter is represented by a log "ghost" structure and serves as a comparison to those buildings in the South Yard. For more information on this site, see our [blog](#).

[Full Excavation Report](#)

[Full Object Report](#)

[Floral Analysis Report](#)

[Architectural Structure Report](#)

[Field Quarter Homes](#)



The field quarter is located in the fields down the hill from the visitor center parking lot. Archaeological surveys and excavations revealed this area to contain the remains of the Madison-era farm complex—consisting of several slave quarters, barns, work areas, and an overseer’s house. During the 2012-2013 season, archaeologist located and excavated the remains of three homes for enslaved field workers. Based on the finds from these digs, these homes were log structures with clay floors, stick and mud chimneys, and very basic furnishings. In contrast to the stable quarter, there were no brick hearths nor evidence for glazed windows—these were basic structures where the enslaved families’ ingenuity and community connections provided means for shelter. In fact the only archaeological evidence for the structural locations came from the presence of sub-floor pits where families stored root crops. Our near terms plans for interpreting these homes consist of interpretive signs. What is exciting about this work and living complex is that it represents where the majority of the enslaved community lived and is very accessible from the visitor center (walking distance from visitors’ cars is closer to this area than to the mansion). We will be ghosting this structure in 2015 during our next Log Cabin Workshop For a brief summary of this site, see the [following blog](#).

[Full Excavation Report \(field quarter\)](#)

[Full Object Report \(field quarter\)](#)

[Floral Analysis Report](#)

[Architectural Structure Report](#)

[Tobacco Barn Quarter](#)

The Tobacco Barn Quarter was initially selected as the site to represent the homes for enslaved field hands for the comparative project. Our excavations at this site soon revealed the structure to be a support building. Excavations revealed burn trenches that indicated use as a tobacco barn (which matched an 1871 visitor account for this site) for smoke cured tobacco. While in use as a tobacco barn, it was also used as a slave residence--hence the reason for the internal cooking pits and trash pit beside the

structure. This site's location is along one of the historic road traces on the property (today the main visitor path between the VC and the Madison Family Cemetery) and as such will be an important structure to ghost in the next several years.

[Full Excavation Report \(Tobacco Barn Quarter\)](#)

[Full Object Report \(Tobacco Barn Quarter\)](#)

[Floral Analysis Report](#)

To see a video produced by the National Endowment for the Humanities on our project, [click here](#).